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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE:

**The emergence of regional organizations in Latin America and implications for the future
of the Organization of American States (OAS)**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Executive Summary

Title: “The emergence of regional organizations in Latin America and implications for the future of the Organization of American States (OAS).”

Author: Commander Emílio, Brazil Marine Corps.

Thesis: The makeup and policies of the Organization of American States favors the emergence of other regional organizations in the Western Hemisphere.

Discussion: This thesis provides information and analysis concerning the recent emergence of regional organizations in Latin America and focuses attention on implications related to the future role of the OAS. The study begins by explaining how the OAS is postured and presents an analysis of the main factors that affect the efficiency of the organization such as the US policy towards Latin America that has resulted in the emergence of regional organizations. The thesis then provides insights that may contribute to the improvement of the efficiency of the OAS.

Conclusion: The recent emergence of regional organizations with similar objectives and proposals of the OAS demands a deep reform of its policies towards Latin America.

Preface and Acknowledgements

The OAS is passing through a critical moment. The existence of the organization is “in check”. Today more than ever the OAS needs to adapt and change in order to keep alive the Pan-American dream. Although Latin American states have chosen the regionalism instead of multilateralism, some analysts are proposing that the organization is still relevant. Others are suggesting that the OAS will be replaced by a Latin American regional organization. This study does not seek to predict the future of the OAS, but rather seeks to analyze the facts that are provoking such debates.

The Master of Military Studies program is a unique opportunity for international military students. We are immersed in the American culture for one year, learning how the American people live, think, act, and react on a daily basis. So, I decided to choose a topic that unites my experience here in the US with my experience as a Brazilian and a Latin American. During the Culture and Interagency Operations seminars, I realized that the US foreign policy towards Latin American states through the OAS is a topic full of contentions and controversies.

Although this paper major objective is to provide some useful insights for the OAS, this thesis is inserted in the academic importance of the international relations. Thus, this research also provides perceptions about history, foreign policy, economy, security, cultural, and social issues that can be useful for future studies about the relationship between the US and the Latin American states. It also presents the reader with up-to-date information that appeared recently in journals, magazines, and books.

I wish to express my special gratitude to my mentor, Dr. Pauletta Otis, for helping me to improve this work and to refine my thoughts. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to be a member of her conference group at Command and Staff College. The insights provided by her during briefings, lectures, and seminars will never be forgotten and are embedded in some of my own thoughts.

The price that military families pay is always high. I would like to express my gratitude and acknowledgement to my wife and son for their patience and supportiveness. Without their help it would have been very difficult to accomplish this mission.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the recent emergence of regional organizations in Latin America, such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), focusing on implications for the future role of the OAS. These regional organizations, specially the CELAC, provoke many polemic debates in the international arena because they have the same goals and purposes of the Organization of American States (OAS) but with one big difference: the US and Canada are not part of it.

The OAS is the oldest regional organization in the world. It represents an ideal organizational system of state alliances. Thus, it was created with the same spirit of the United Nations (UN) that emerged after the Second World War (WWII). In fact, according to the OAS Charter, it is a subsystem of the UN responsible for the Americas. The creation of the OAS, like all the others idealistic systems, was a large step for the weaker states of Latin America and inside the multilateral system represented by the OAS, the member states had to negotiate their aspirations for security and prosperity with the powerful United States.

The history of the relationship among the member states is full of controversy, mainly between the US and the Latin American states. Opposite interests, different priorities, political and economic pressure characterized decades of negotiations in the forums of the OAS. In the end, the OAS was branded by the Latin American states as an ineffective and outdated organization. This fact among others facilitated the emergence of regional organizations that in reality are threatening the existence of the OAS, requiring urgent deep reforms on its policies toward Latin America.

Therefore, the first chapter of this paper explains what is happening with the OAS in 2012, focusing on the main challenges that the institution is facing. The second chapter provides basic

information about the OAS from the time of its creation, framing the most significant aspects of the evolution of the organization in order to understand how the OAS was shaped across the time. The third chapter studies the roots of the OAS system, analyzing the main forces that affect the functioning of the organization. Finally, the last chapter extracts conclusions from the analysis, providing some insights that can contribute to improve the efficiency of the organization.

WHAT IS HAPPENING TODAY WITH THE OAS?

In 2011, the OAS published a document titled “*Meeting the Challenges – The role of the OAS in the Americas*” on its website. According to this document, the period from 2005 to 2010 was characterized by a time of change and challenge in which the American States faced a number of political and economic crises with tension between the member states. According to José Miguel Insulza, Secretary General of the OAS, the organization met the challenges rapidly and successfully, working as the region’s primary multilateral political forum.¹

In his viewpoint, the OAS has played a key role in keeping security between bordering countries. It took solid actions to fight poverty and promote social and economic growth. According to him, the OAS is a vibrant and significant institution, with an integrated vision, a clear configuration, and a convincing voice and presence on topics that are important to the American people. Finally, he added that at a time of new responsibilities and challenges, “the Organization is fully prepared” to do so in the future.²

Thus, the OAS sees itself as the main multilateral institution in the Americas functioning as an integrated and unified organism that is listened to by its members. Moreover, it is an efficient and dynamic organization that possesses a well-organized and innovative structure fully capable to deal with the challenges of the 21st century. So, the question is: Is there a problem with the organization, and if so what is it?

In 2010, thirty-three countries of the Americas created the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). Hugo Chavez, the president of Venezuela, said that the Monroe Doctrine and the OAS represented the “will of the United States imposed on Latin America countries” and that as times go by, CELAC will displace the outdated OAS.³ He added that although the OAS implemented a new format, it is an impotent “old body” that has been

“eroded” by time. According to him, CELAC was born with a new spirit. It is a platform for people's economic, political and social progress, which is very distinctive from OAS.⁴

For Daniel Ortega, Nicaraguan President, the creation of CELAC is a punishment for US interference in Latin America. Some analysts are calling the birth of CELAC “the death” of the OAS, adding that it will continue to exist but it will not have the same political power that it had in the past because the organization, instead of solving problems, created and magnified them.⁵ Moreover, by common consensus, the next CELAC summit will be headed by Cuba, in Havana, reflecting the united opposition of the members of CELAC to US foreign policy. The Peruvian chancellor, Rafael Rocangiolo, said that the decision on Cuba constitutes an “indispensable historic demand” and added that Cuba is a icon of the cause of Latin America.⁶

CELAC also supported Argentina in the Malvinas / Falklands Islands dispute.⁷ Rafael Correa, President of Ecuador, stated that the OAS should have come to an end because the Inter-American Reciprocal Protection Treaty was violated in 1982 during the Malvinas / Falklands Conflict. He added that the US did not support a member country but rather a European country. So, he believes that the Latin American states need to build a new Latin American model, where they can discuss the issues of the region in the region, not only those relative to Washington.⁸

Insulza welcomed efforts by American states to create the CELAC, which will “surely (become) an efficient instrument for regional political synchronization and agreement.” He highlighted the fact that all countries in CELAC are also OAS members, a detail that produces natural congruence. He added that he would initiate contact with it in order to study the extensive range of opportunities for cooperation between the two organizations.⁹ In 2011, Insulza, at the Summit of Heads of State of MERCOSUR in Uruguay, also said that MERCOSUR will play an increasing responsibility in the new advances of the international structure.¹⁰

The OAS is a relevant institution. The importance of its role can be well exemplified by the successful Mission of Assistance for the Removal of Mines in Nicaragua and Central America (MARMINCA) that freed many countries from anti-personnel landmines after 19 years of work.¹¹ In 2012, in a meeting with the OAS secretary general, Sergey Ryabkov, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, said that the OAS's function, as arbitrator in resolving disagreements in the area, especially the efforts made in the crisis between Colombia and Ecuador in 2008, is "proof of the organization's importance and relevance."¹²

However, what gives life to this kind of organization are the attitudes and policies adopted by its member governments in relation to common problems.¹³ Therefore, the OAS is not guilty for what went wrong in the past. The true responsible for the political failures of the past are the member states, not the institution.

Nevertheless, today the image of the OAS as the main multilateral institution of the Americas is been weakened by the emergence of many regional organizations with the same principles, purposes, and goals. It seems that the OAS is blind, ignoring what is really happening in the Americas. The secretary general of the OAS actually is only doing his job as a leader, using a positive strategic vision that focus the successes and hide the failures of the organization, in order to keep the institution motivated to achieve its idealistic goals.

HOW THE OAS WAS SHAPED ACROSS THE TIME?

The idea to create one unified inter-American system, or Pan Americanism, was born in the early 19th century with Simon Bolivar, the Liberator, who encouraged the Latin American states to forget the three centuries of Spanish domination, and take their place as sovereign nations. The movement found its first manifestation in the Treaty of Perpetual Union, League and Confederation signed at the Congress of Panama, in 1826. ¹⁴

At this time, Bolivar convened a congress of American States to meet in Panama for the purpose of bringing together the new republics in order to develop a unified defense policy towards the Spanish Empire. Bolívar efforts to inaugurate a confederation of American States integrated most of the significant juridical values that have place in the OAS today. ¹⁵ However, Bolivar`s project for such international organization was far from reality. It was a large step for the new republics. Consequently, although the treaty of Panama was not ratified, the ideal of American unification persevered. The Bolivarian spirit was only frozen, not dead. ¹⁶

The OAS is the world`s oldest regional body, dating to the First International Conference of American States (1889), held in Washington, D.C. ¹⁷ Eighteen American countries took part in that meeting, in which it was decided to establish a kind of “International Union of American Republics.” Actually, the designation “Union of American Republics” was one the many names proposed in 1945 during the elaboration of the draft of the OAS Charter. This meeting laid the bases of what would later become the OAS: business affairs in order to achieve more integration among the American countries in an atmosphere of regional collaboration and security. ¹⁸

From 1889 to 1928, six Conferences of American States were realized. During this time, the US was more interested in expanding business relations with Latin America than in the establishment of measures for the peaceful settlement of disputes. The Latin American countries

had the same interests in trade growth, but they considered the Pan Americanism mainly as a way to achieve security against foreign intervention. So, contradictory thoughts about the objectives of the unification movement marked its first years.¹⁹

Over the years, a set of bodies was progressively created to facilitate collaboration in particular areas. The following organizations were created: the Pan American Health Organization (1902); the Inter-American Juridical Committee (1906); the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (1928); the Inter-American Indian Institute (1940); the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (1942); and the Inter-American Defense Board (1942). Therefore, a complex system of international bodies was created to intensify cooperation among American countries on the wide variety of issues on the local agenda.²⁰

The period between the late 1920`s and the end of the World War II was marked by a general congruence of priorities. By this time, 1938 to 1945, the US progressively recognized the nonintervention principle and the establishment of regional security arrangements. The American states realized reciprocal advantages and compatible interests in local organizations and the period was considered the most congruent in its history.²¹

In 1947, the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Continental Peace and Security, organized in Brazil, implemented the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty) in order to certify “legitimate collective self-defense in the event of an attack” from a external power and to adopt joint actions in the occurrence of a disagreement between two American countries.²² Harold E. Davis noted in 1948 that the Rio Treaty had been drawn with a view to motivate the approval of the OAS Charter.²³

In 1948, twenty-one states adopted the charter of the OAS at the Ninth International Conference of American States in Colombia.²⁴ The organization was founded in order to reach

among its members an environment of peace and justice, to encourage their unity, to fortify their cooperation, and to protect their sovereignty.²⁵ According to Dreier, together with the Charter they represented the two main pillars of the OAS structure.²⁶

The fact that a regional institution was spontaneously founded by a group of nations of such unequal dimension, power and priorities as the US and the Latin American countries is a proof that there existed at that time enough common confidence in their mutual goals to overcome the obstacles imposed by the disparities.²⁷

After 1948, democracy in Latin America had begun to decline and military dictators took over the governments in numerous countries. They did not want an OAS body that would “intervene” in their affairs under an international authorization.²⁸ Nevertheless, the OAS had performed successfully in keeping peace and security among the American republics, protecting the sovereignty of the Latin American states.²⁹

During the 1950s, many actions taken by the OAS to put an end to hostilities and restore peace and security in the hemisphere makes its name familiar and favorably known to the people of the twenty-one republics. For example, the speed with which the OAS actions stopped hostilities between Costa Rica and Nicaragua in 1955 and between Honduras and Nicaragua in 1957 brought the prestige of the OAS to a high point. Supported by the nonintervention principle, the OAS worked effectively, offering the world a demonstration of how a local joint security arrangement could work successfully.³⁰

The OAS also functions as the secretariat for numerous conferences, such as the meetings of Ministers of Justice, Labor, Science, Technology, and Education.³¹ The availability of resources to conduct such variety of issues is a limiting factor. Latin American countries have had no capacity or motivation to approve higher budgets for the OAS. In 2010, the General

Assembly adopted the program budget for a total nearly US\$ 85 million for fiscal year 2011. The three largest contributors (2010) are Canada with US\$ 22.3 million, followed by the US with US\$ 20 million, and Spain with US\$ 5.2 million. The remaining 66.7% of the 2010 contributions came from member states, 23.0% from permanent observers, and 10.3% from other donors.³²

Between 1971 and 2012, the OAS granted permanent observer status to 67 states and European Union. Permanent observers participate in the organization's activities, contribute to its programs, and attend the public meetings in which they may also speak. In 2010, permanent observers funded a total of US\$ 15.7 million in cash contributions.³³ Moreover, during 2010, OAS leaders visited some of the principal European donor countries where they encountered highest-level political authorities in order to promote the efforts of the OAS to the international society and to discuss the organization priorities for the future years.³⁴

The OAS Charter has been reformed four times: Buenos Aires (1967), Cartagena (1985), Washington (1992), and Managua (1993).³⁵ So, the adjustment of the OAS is nothing original. Actually structural changes have almost always been present on the agenda of the organization. The several reforms reflect the discrepancy of essential interests between the US and most of Latin America. However, the OAS continues to exist despite the opposing interests and views of its members, indicating that the benefits effects are bigger than the harmful restraints.³⁶

THE ROOTS OF THE PROBLEM

The US Policy Toward Latin America

The OAS has one big challenge to deal with: the relationship between the Latin America states and the US. This aspect of the problem was irrelevant in the birth of the Pan-Americanism. However, by 2012 it became one of the most influential forces affecting the OAS.³⁷ There is a dual aspect of reciprocal repugnance and magnetism between the Latin America states and the U.S. Consequently, the development of the OAS was marked by unstable and often divergent aspirations among the member states, mainly those between Latin America and the US.³⁸

The US approached the issue of a regional organization in a different way than had Bolívar. The US was a robust influence capable of protecting itself. Thus, there was little US interest in defense. The US wanted to establish economic relations with Latin America constructed on a system of mediation of international disagreements.³⁹ So, the Monroe Doctrine (1823) was only a unilateral statement where the US assumed the role of protector of Americas, not an American defense agreement envisioned by Bolívar in the Congress of Panama (1826).⁴⁰

As time went on, the Latin America countries feared the growing power of the US. The US annexed Texas (1845) and then seized a large part of Mexico during the Mexico-American War (1848).⁴¹ Thus, the US unilaterally changed its posture from protector of the Americas to tutor of the Americas. In addition, under the Roosevelt Corollary (1904) to the Monroe Doctrine, the US proclaimed the right to intervene in Latin America in order to avoid the interference of European powers. According to this policy, the US intervened in Cuba (1906), Nicaragua (1909), Haiti (1915), and the Dominican Republic (1916).⁴²

Three decades of intervention left permanent scars on inter-American relations.⁴³ Interventions tended to create disgust and hatred among Latin America states towards the US. In

response, the Latin America countries started to look to the inter-American system as a way to obtain respect for their sovereignty. Between 1890 and 1933, inter-American relations were dominated by efforts of the Latin America states to restrain the US growing power.⁴⁴

The US attention to Latin America has changed significantly across time and according to the regional circumstances. Basically, the US policy has been oriented to prevent and exclude foreign influence in Latin America, assuring US leadership in the Americas. So, Latin America was insulated by the US from the rest of the world. The US wanted to unify the Americas in a regional organization under its influence and domination.⁴⁵

In 1933, with Latin America hostilities growing and the paucity of European threats to the region, the US abandoned the Roosevelt Corollary and adopted the principle of nonintervention in the domestic affairs of Latin America.⁴⁶ The Good Neighbor Policy was adopted by President Franklin Roosevelt and considerably reduced hemispheric contentions.⁴⁷ At that time, there was a common sense that this new policy would generate new economic opportunities and reaffirm the influence of the US in Latin America.⁴⁸

During World War II, the US fought against the central powers in order to keep the equilibrium of power in Europe, avoiding the consolidation of a rich empire in Europe that could threaten its own security. This Eurocentric orientation of American thinking became the basis of US foreign policy for the next four decades.⁴⁹

Between the end of WWII and the 1960`s, the OAS was again characterized by conflicting objectives and diverging interactions. During this period, the US and Latin America totally inverted their respective visions about the organization. In the context of the Cold War, the US started to pursue mainly security objectives while Latin America basically aimed economic goals. The US abandoned its isolationism policy and adopted an internationalist posture, starting

to view the region only in security terms.⁵⁰

In 1954, the US submitted a proposal to the OAS against the international communist conspiracy in Guatemala. After persuasive discussions and US pressure, the OAS approved a resolution that considered the international communist movement a threat to the sovereignty and political independence of the American states.⁵¹ These plans were abandoned when the situation became calmer and the communist conspiracy ended without assistance from the OAS.⁵²

The Cuban Revolution (1953-1959) led by Fidel Castro Revolution significantly stressed the US-Latin American relations. The beginning of the revolution was characterized by the removal of large land properties, agrarian reform, and an open break with the US. These issues represented the deepest aspirations of the masses in Latin America. Naturally Latin American states adopted a posture of tolerance toward the Cuban revolution.⁵³

For Latin American states, the OAS had become an instrument to protect them against US intervention. Fear of US political domination was the main reason for Latin America reluctance to take a stronger position against communism.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the US was thinking according to the “domino theory,” in which the communism would spread throughout the Americas like a disease.⁵⁵ For the US, the OAS was an inadequate tool for dealing with the threat of communism in Latin America. The validity of the organization was in doubt.⁵⁶

In 1962, under US pressure, the OAS decided to exclude the Castro government from the organization, declaring that communism was incompatible with the principles of the system.⁵⁷ However, it was not a unanimous decision. On this occasion, six countries, including the three largest, Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, deviated from the US position by abstaining.⁵⁸ Between 1970 and 1974, a clear sentiment was developed in some OAS member states in favor of reconsidering the Cuban case but the US resisted any relaxation of Cuban isolation and

persuaded enough Latin American states to block any easing of sanctions.

The Sixteenth OAS Meeting (1975) allowed each member state to reestablish relations with Cuba even though Cuba remained excluded from participation in the OAS.⁵⁹ The protocol incorporates the principle of ideological pluralism in the OAS, stating as one of the purposes to reaffirm the right of all states to choose freely their political, economic, and social organizations.⁶⁰ By 2009, the OAS decided that the 1962 resolution should cease to have effect.⁶¹ According to Insulza, the decision seemed to eliminate an obsolete decision taken during the Cold War.⁶²

In summary, during the Cold War, the US foreign policy towards Latin America practiced a unilateral anti-communist intervention notably in Guatemala (1954), Cuba and the Dominican Republic (1965). In numerous cases, Washington played a hegemonic role and induced OAS policy through financial motivation, military backing, and other material aid.⁶³ These efforts, along with US protectionist economic policies, increased Latin America frustration with the organization.⁶⁴

Furthermore, US policies toward Latin America were always crisis-oriented. Once a specific crisis ended, the US tends to ignore the region, focusing its attention on other areas.⁶⁵ After the end of the Cold War, the US as a hegemonic power was able to determine and maintain the essential rules by which relations among Latin America states are governed. The hegemonic state had the power to nullify existing rules, to prevent the adoption of rules it opposed, and played a dominant position in creating new rules.⁶⁶

The US came to practice “virtual control over the internal affairs” of several American states by becoming the leading trading partner, projecting and pulling back its military power, and creating and ending regimes. Although the kind of intervention so commonly exercised by

the US in its neighboring area was not found as much in the distant South America, the South American states were impacted by the hegemonic influence, like Chile for example.⁶⁷

The Security Issue

According to Dreier, the keystone in the OAS is the principle of nonintervention. This principle holds the structure of the Pan Americanism. Consequently, the evolution of the OAS placed emphasis upon the protection of the sovereignty and independence of the member states. In fact, the guarantee of sovereignty is the major purpose toward which the American states signed the Rio Treaty (1947) and the OAS Charter (1948).⁶⁸

The OAS Charter positioned the organization as a regional agency of the United Nations.⁶⁹ However, the OAS had no organ such as the Security Council.⁷⁰ The military agency of the OAS is the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB). Latin America leaders always restricted the role of the IADB in order to avoid danger to the nonintervention principle. Thus, the IADB has no power to organize forces or establish a unified command.⁷¹ So, the member states were always reluctant to grant effective military power to the OAS. For security issues, the Rio Treaty obligations were clear, but the OAS organ for planning and operations was barely significant.⁷²

In terms of defense, the OAS has functioned mainly as an instrument for coordination under the control of the US. This reality was inevitable because the US was the only American military power.⁷³ According to Desch, President Franklin Roosevelt said that the US must be prepared to resist attack against Americas “from the North Pole to the South Pole.”⁷⁴

During WWII, the US established a defensive perimeter of air bases in the Caribbean and the northeastern part of South America to win the U-boat war that was threatening its sea lines of communications.⁷⁵ Militarily, the US allocated to the area only the resources essential to defeat

the U-Boats. Politically, the US implemented policies that reduced frictions and so increased US Security.⁷⁶ After WWII, the US had insulated the area in as a “sphere of influence.”⁷⁷

In 1947, the bloc gained military strength with the Rio Treaty, the first permanent collective defense treaty signed by the US.⁷⁸ The Rio Treaty for Latin American countries represented a high point in their conviction in the objectives of the US. Under its terms the US can be obligated to interrupt diplomatic relationships with an aggressor country when two-thirds of the Latin American nations so resolve. However, the treaty does not establish any arrangement of military forces under joint command, differently from NATO. Even so, the Rio Treaty represents an outstanding grant of political power to the OAS.⁷⁹

In 1962, the Cuban crisis presented a new security issue. The crisis directly threatened the homeland of the US and indirectly threatened the credibility of the NATO-US strategy to maintain the balance of power in Europe.⁸⁰ The US-NATO sea lines of communications seemed to be threatened by a Latin America state associated with the Soviet Union.⁸¹ This threat could have forced the US to transfer a substantial number of assets from other missions, and consequently could have impacted the US capacity to defend the Western Europe.⁸²

In 1970, a movement was initiated to modify the Rio Treaty and the security aspects of the OAS Charter.⁸³ The US was criticized at various OAS meetings for its interventionism, economic neglect, and domination of the organization, reflecting the policy of coercion and intransigence over the Cuban issue.⁸⁴ At the Sixth OAS General Assembly (1976), Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, representing US policy, sharply criticized the plans to reform, restructure, and modernize the OAS. Eventually, the Anti-Communist alliance was refuted.⁸⁵

The Rio Treaty delineates a zone that includes the Malvinas / Falklands Islands, near Argentina.⁸⁶ In 1982, the principles of the Treaty had been seriously undermined during the

Malvinas / Falklands crisis, when the US supported the United Kingdom instead of Argentina. The feeling that the US had “betrayed” Argentina and the OAS was inserted into regional geopolitical strategic thinking. That was one of the enduring legacies of the conflict that further undermined the US policy and position vis a vis the OAS.⁸⁷

In a review of several studies about the Malvinas / Falklands conflict, written mainly by Latin Americans, Joseph Tulchin stated that all Latin American experts are convinced that the conflict is a clear demonstration that the OAS did not work, “except for the convenience of the US.” Tulchin further holds that the security of Latin America can be assured only through regional integration.⁸⁸ In 2011, CELAC, the new organization that includes all OAS members except the US and Canada, stated that the organization supports “Argentina’s legitimate rights” in the sovereignty disagreement over the Malvinas / Falklands Islands.⁸⁹

The Social and Economic Issue

The US controlled Latin America countries politically, militarily, and economically, since the end of the nineteenth century and had a dominant influence on the region. In the Spanish-American War (1898), Spain lost all the remaining possessions in the Western Hemisphere, and the US became the major power in the Caribbean. US political and economic pressure is still asserted mainly in the lands around the Caribbean, but US investment “touches every country” in the continent. Latin America has been considered an “outlet for the export” of US money and merchandises and a font of commodities and raw materials.⁹⁰

However, the US only established economic dominance in Latin America during the twentieth century and then largely as a result of the two world wars. Most Latin American countries did not welcome this economic change. Although the US provided valuable equipment

exports, many Latin American products could not easily be sold in US markets. Tariffs and others obstacles obstructed Latin American commodities from entering the US. Trade with the US usually meant balance of payment troubles. Thus, the Latin America states became heavily indebted to the US and their currencies weakened.⁹¹

The success achieved by the OAS in the avoidance of hostility among its members until mid-1960`s were broadly admired. However, the organization failed to achieve similar success in economic and social terms. The root of this problem was that once economic questions were submitted to the OAS for decision, the biggest economy becomes only one of twenty-one juridical equal members. Thus, negotiations for economic agreements in the OAS have usually turned into useless discussions on economic theory. They served only to amplify rather than to reduce the difference between the US and its neighbors.⁹²

From 1959 to 1961, organizational advances in the OAS, such as the creation of the Inter-American Development Bank demonstrated a significant change in the US economic policy towards Latin America. The US accepted a wider commitment to the social and economic development of the Latin American nations. In 1961, the new policy was bolstered by President John Kennedy, who proclaimed an Alliance for Progress calling for the formulation of a ten-year program of economic and social development.⁹³

The Alliance for Progress had little impact because Latin America countries lacked resources and were not ready to implement the wider objectives of the plan. According to Blouet, as military governments took power in many countries in the 1960s, the financial aid supported dictators rather than to promote democracy and development.⁹⁴ As a consequence, funding for the Alliance for Progress was deeply reduced and the idea eventually rejected.⁹⁵

As a consequence, in the 1960s, the Latin American states initiated a movement to amend

the OAS Charter and restructure the OAS. The main reason was the increasing divergence between Latin American economic concerns and the US emphasis on security considerations.⁹⁶ Latin America seemed to have a low priority in US policy in both economic and security terms. The OAS Charter was revised in an environment of diverging interests.⁹⁷

In 1967, OAS members approved an amendment to the OAS Charter that strengthened the OAS economic and social commitments. These amendments additionally restructured the OAS and gave equal status to aspects related to economy, education, science, and culture thereby putting them on the same organizational level as the security function.⁹⁸ These changes marked a major step forward in the evolution of the OAS. The economic integration of Latin America was the basic comprehensive goal under which social and economic programs were delineated.⁹⁹

During the 1970's and the 1980's, Latin American countries were frustrated by slow economic growth. They decided to change economic policy from import-substitution industrialization to an export-oriented industrialization in order to make their economies more competitive and to turn Latin America into a manufacturer of goods.¹⁰⁰ During the 1990s, economic development picked up as administrations implemented the policies recommended by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The new economic model was effective and Latin American economies entered into a new phase.¹⁰¹

Regionalism versus Multilateralism

Geographical nearness is the starting point of the regionalism phenomenon. Unless there is an hostility between two countries, "one trades with one's neighbors first before moving further afield." Common historical experiences and the cultural similarities are more likely with

bordering countries than those from afar. There is a tendency toward formalization of these regional patterns into a series of cooperative activities to facilitate regional integration.¹⁰²

There are intimate connections between state policies and regionalism. States took political decisions under political and economic pressure from powerful actors.¹⁰³ According to Atkins, the eternal Latin America dilemma is how to modernize their societies while excluding external interference by more powerful actors. A regional organization is seen as a way to solve this dilemma.¹⁰⁴ Thus, Latin American states are seeing the regionalism phenomenon as a way to oppose the hegemonic connection with the US in terms of political and economic autonomy.

During the 1960s and 1970s, there were efforts to create regional economic organizations. The Central American Common Market (1960), the Latin America Free Trade Association (1961), The Caribbean Free Trade Association (1968), and the Caribbean Common Market (1973) were institutionalized. However, at that time Latin American states were promoting import substitution manufacturing and protecting home markets with high tariffs. Therefore, the newly formed economic groups did not work as expected because free trade arrangements require open markets.¹⁰⁵

This situation started to change during the 1990s when Latin American states realized that they needed to open their economies to succeed in the competitive global market. Thus, foreign investment was encouraged allowing foreign entities to buy or create companies. State companies were sold to private concerns and tariffs reduced which stimulated demand and promoted economic growth. In 1991, the Common Southern Market (MERCOSUR) was created. In 1993, the US, Canada, and Mexico signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).¹⁰⁶ In 1996, an attempt was made to revitalize the Andean Community of Nations (CAN) that was a customs union among Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.¹⁰⁷

As time went on, a kind of political regional integration tendency began. In 1987, the Central America Parliament (PARLACEN) was created by Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Panama and Dominican Republic with the fundamental objective of realizing the integration of the Central American countries.¹⁰⁸ In 2004, The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) was established as an economic and political block constituted by Antigua, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and St Vincent.¹⁰⁹ In 2008, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), was created by all South American states as an organization with international juridical character.¹¹⁰

Like the OAS, the objective of the UNASUR was to build integration in the cultural, social, economic and political fields and strengthen democracy. However, the UNASUR treaty emphasizes the idea that regional integration is a decisive step towards the bolstering of multilateralism in order to achieve a multipolar, well-adjusted and just world.¹¹¹ The South American Defense Council (CDS) was created as an agency of the UNASUR in order to improve regional security integration, seeking to promote the exchange on security matters.¹¹²

In 2010, the peak of the regionalism phenomenon was reached in Latin America with the creation of the CELAC, the new organization that counts with the membership of all American states, except the US and Canada. According to Lendman, the OAS can continue to work as a forum to embrace all American nations, but within CELAC the Latin America countries can synchronize matters of mutual interest from their viewpoint without US intervention.¹¹³

The headquarters of the OAS is in Washington, DC, near the White House, the State Department, the Pentagon, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Inter-American Development Bank. Moreover, in financial terms, the US is the main investor of the OAS and every state of the OAS has an ambassador to the OAS living in Washington. Therefore,

the OAS is under political pressure of Washington.¹¹⁴ According to Lendman, CELAC is a “Washington-controlled” OAS alternative.¹¹⁵

These regional organizations give a new dynamic to Latin American. The groupings help place their associates within the agenda of globalization and motivate Latin America vitality -- components that are critical for growth. Distancing their members from useless conflicts, the integration plans are unifying the efforts of a variety of important political and social players such as the business community, the political elite, and the international community.¹¹⁶

The new regionalism in Latin America may carry with it the answer to a different multilateralism. These regional associations are not related with the ambitions of a US-led multilateralism. The new regional arrangements are “bottom-up integration processes based on the attraction of markets, not top-down government decisions.” The new regionalism may yet be “the key” to a feasible multilateralism in the new era.¹¹⁷

In summary, a regionalist-based order seems to be both welcoming and forward-looking. Belonging to a regional organization is for many Latin American countries an opportunity for their commodities access other markets, but had never really extracted from negotiations in the OAS forums. Regionalism is being chosen because the outdated multilateralism did not satisfy the hopes of many of countries. What may have been tolerated because there was no other choice, does not need to be the only present reality.¹¹⁸

The New Americas

The relationship among OAS members, specifically the US and the Latin America states, has significantly changed in the past decade. The period of automatic association with the US has ended. In addition, today Latin America occupies a low priority position on the US strategic

agenda because there is no significant threat to the US emerging from the area. In such context, existing divergences between the US and Latin America are essentially economic issues.¹¹⁹

Today Latin America states are changing at a rapid rate. The explosive growth in capital flows has made Latin American governments at large more responsive to international markets. The states have made sweeping policy changes and become important “magnets for the attraction” of foreign direct investment.¹²⁰ Consequently, people are better fed, dressed, and educated. Views of poverty are much diminished and countries have progressed beyond producing raw materials, to the export of manufactured goods.¹²¹

The US is also changing. In 2012, the US is no more the primary political and economic model. In the past, the US was a kind of political, economic and moral example to be followed. According to Wiarda, the components in American culture that Latin American most appreciated have progressively reduced.¹²² Consequently, Latin America is looking for a new alternative developmental model different from those of the US and Europe.¹²³

The US no longer has the means to dominate world markets. Globalization has fundamentally altered the context within which governments must function. According to Tussie, the US no longer has “the power to bend every country to its will” because its relative bargaining power is declining in face of the emergent regional markets. The new regional organizations will “deal with each other on a more equal footing.”¹²⁴

During an OAS summit in 2009, President Barack Obama promised a “new era of partnership” among the Americas that would replace out-of-date debates and ideologies. However, the OAS meetings that were held immediately after a coup in Honduras revitalized the old rhetoric. US policies throughout the OAS are impacted by US domestic disputes. Although

Republicans are trying to reverse his decision, recently President Obama made one big change: He abolished all restrictions on travel and transfers by Cuban-Americans.¹²⁵

In Latin America, a more realistic scenario at present is the continuation of the bottom-up process. The regional organizations are gradually joining or cooperating with each other. This regional net may gain enough economic and political power to change US policy, stimulating the US into making real its promise of a free trade area in the Americas.¹²⁶ The creation of an intensely competitive international trading system provoked a need for a more democratic and inclusive decision-making process. This bottom-up strategy seems to be the Latin America preferred choice. The problem is that this choice excludes the OAS from the integration process.

IMPLICATIONS TO THE OAS

The OAS has a significant role in the US policies toward Latin America. Sooner or later the US will review its policies and procedures with respect to the organization and to Latin America. So far, the OAS has received only routine attention on the part of the top executives of the US government who have confined themselves to essentially pro forma involvement in its events.¹²⁷ Latin America desires to be politically free of the US but at the same time all states also recognize the need for several practices of US cooperation and assistance.¹²⁸

The OAS should motivate the US to adopt a new successful Good Neighbor and Alliance for Progress policy toward Latin America. A new policy must frankly and directly demonstrate that the US is putting his hegemonic vision aside and is interested in the region through real actions and goodwill. So far, President Obama's New Era of Relationship policy is merely rhetoric for most Latin American people. In fact, nothing is seen to have changed since the announcement. The OAS needs this change in the US posture in order to be relevant to all American states; otherwise no state will pay attention to the organization.

The idea to change the posture of the hegemonic superpower seems a daunting task, but it is not. Actually, the current changings that are happening not only in the Americas, but also throughout the world due to the globalization phenomenon, will create the appropriate circumstances and opportunities that can be explored by the OAS to achieve this goal. Today the US simply cannot exercise the same kind of control over Latin American states as he did in the past. The changes in the global and Latin America economic environment naturally will not allow it. So, the US will necessarily be pushed toward this policy change.

So far, US policymakers have been focused his attention on Mexico and the Caribbean area.¹²⁹ However, profound changes in the South American subsystem and its relationships with

the outside world require fundamental reevaluation on the part of the US.¹³⁰ Undoubtedly the changes that have been happening in South America demand a huge rethinking of US policies towards the region. They are no longer weak, underdeveloped countries convinced to accept US leadership. They have become far more modernized and institutionalized in political and economic terms. These advances have been complemented by a deep nationalism and more decisiveness in the international arena.¹³¹

There is one international tendency to consider all Latin American states as one unified system. However, they are very distinctive and are changing differently. There are actually many subsystems such as the Caribbean, the Southern Cone, and the Andean states. Some analysts are considering Brazil one single subsystem itself. Thus, each subsystem has its own political and economic peculiarities and priorities. Therefore, the US through the OAS must change the way he looks to the region. Instead of putting them in one sole box, the US must visualize the subsystems, dealing with them according to their aspirations and necessities.

Finally, the US posture toward Cuba is a scar in the OAS history. The US pressure against Cuba provoked an anti-US movement inside the OAS that culminated with the dissolution of the anti-communist alliance. Thus, definitely this posture did not work. Only in 2009, the OAS was capable to revoke the 1962 Cuba suspension. Even so, Cuba is still not a member of the OAS again because the US pressure still exists. This is one of the old debates mentioned by President Obama that should be forgotten. However, the return of Cuba to the OAS is vital to the organization and a question of honor to many Latin America countries. Therefore, the OAS must insistently give a high priority to this issue, looking for a way to return Cuba to the system.

Despite the existing concerns with economic and other factors, security is actually the main strategic end of any state.¹³² Moreover, US military involvements that aim to establish

democratic or overthrow authoritarian governments have demonstrated that these courses of action are disruptive and counterproductive.¹³³ Today the lack of a powerful opponent makes such action even less sense.¹³⁴

The nonintervention principle is deeply internalized in Latin American states. It is considered vital for them. Although the principle is mentioned in the OAS Charter, it was actually never followed by the US. Thus, under US pressure, the OAS was incapable of avoiding the many US interventions that happened in the past. It seems that today the changing international environment is creating new dynamics that will naturally reduce the possibility of new interventions. However, the IADB, the OAS security body, must be restructured and empowered. So, the OAS must look for a model similar to the UN Security Council capable to veto US interventions.

The Rio Treaty was an outstanding initiative in the relationship among the OAS members. It was considered by all Latin American states one of the pillars of the OAS because security always had a high priority on their agendas. Thus, the treaty represented exactly the kind of US posture that Latin America states always required. A formal US agreement and commitment posture to one of Latin America most essential needs: security.¹³⁵

However, the US support to the United Kingdom during the Malvinas / Falklands War turned the treaty useless, destroying one of the pillars of the OAS. The US advocated that Argentina attacked first and the treaty was valid only in case of defense. Nevertheless, the US did not posture neutral to the conflict. Actually it supported the United Kingdom with intelligence, fuel, and ammunitions and authorized the utilization of the Ascension Island as an essential advanced base. Instead of help Argentina, the US indirectly fought against it.

Thus, when all these supports became clear, the credibility of the Rio Treaty was literally destroyed. It is another scar in the relationship among the OAS members because it is considered a US betrayal. For Latin Americans, the US-Europe military alliance is more important than the American alliance represented by the OAS. Therefore, the outdated 1947 Rio Treaty must be revised together with the IADB reformulation. The nonintervention principle, the IADB, and the Rio Treaty constitute the triad of the security function of the OAS and must be reviewed together in order to be effective.

Finally, today the old soviet military threat to Western Europe is declining and the new international security environment presents different challenges to the US.¹³⁶ According to Leon Panetta, Secretary of Defense, the US will withdraw troops from Europe and move towards the Pacific and the Middle East. These are the areas where the US “will face the greatest challenges for the future.” He added that the US is at a “strategic turning point.”¹³⁷

This shifting in the US strategic focus from Europe to Asia has complicated implications to the OAS. It means that Latin America will continue to receive a low priority on the US agenda. During the Cold War, Latin America was the right flank of the US-Europe alliance that sometimes deserved some attention. Now, it will be the rear area, far from the US priorities. The OAS has to fix its security function, attracting the US attention before this movement to the pacific is completed.

The forces of globalization are bringing to Latin American countries the reduction of protectionism economic policies that have gradually been abandoned in the last two decades. Thus, the Free Trade Area of the Americas, an old American dream, “remains on the horizon.” Even today, it is still a large step for Latin American states. However, the circumstances are changing. The main resistance is still the precaution with the US economic dominance.¹³⁸

The new Latin America environment is an opportunity to the OAS. The Free Trade Area of Americas did not go ahead for two main reasons: the economic protectionism and the disparity between the economies of the US and the Latin America countries. All countries in the world have a certain level of protectionism in their economies. Moreover, one of the main causes that provoke this practice is the big disparity among the economic power of the states.

This disparity has been reduced by the recent Latin America social and economic prosperity. In 2012, the globalization creates conditions that change the way countries negotiate agreements. For instance, the US can no longer dictate economic terms in the international market simply by its size. In the end, this loss of hegemonic power will not be bad for the US as it will facilitate and motivate the opening of all markets. Even without the bargaining power of the past, the US will be brought to the table of negotiations with Latin America.

The OAS has one big opportunity to revive the 1960`s Alliance for Progress, but with a different approach. In the past, Latin America states were not ready for such a program but the situation has changed. Moreover, instead of a top-down approach, Latin-America states are asking for a bottom-up and more inclusive policy.¹³⁹ The OAS can provoke the rebirth of Kennedy`s ideas as a first step towards the Free Trade Area of Americas. All American countries want economic development and integration. The problem is that they are afraid of the idea because of their past experiences with the US economic dominance. Although this dominance is still strong, the situation is changing and space are opening for effective action.

There is a common sentiment among Latin American countries that a multilateral system can be dangerous. This does not mean that they totally refute the idea but believe that multilateralism is an ideal goal but not a utopia. A regional organization seems like the best “first

step” towards an ideal multilateral system. MERCOSUR, UNASUR, and CARICOM represent the present while a newly invigorated OAS may represent the future.

The exclusion of the superpower and its big neighbor from the inter-American system brings one question to mind. What will happen to the OAS if this exclusion works? The CELAC has many advantages over the OAS. It was created outside the US territory in the new Latin America prosper environment of the 21st century. It has a very balanced economic situation among its members. Finally, as a new organization, it does not have the scars that the weathered OAS has. In the same way that the League of Nations failed as an organization and was replaced by the UN, if the CELAC succeed, there will be one big possibility to replace the OAS.

If the OAS is to survive, it must adopt a more dynamic posture and accelerate the necessary reforms and reinvent itself. One suggestion is the transfer of the headquarters of the organization to one of the Latin America states. Panama may be a good place because it is located exactly in the middle of the Americas and the country represents a kind of link between the Americas. The images of the Bridge of the Americas and the Pan-American Highway may be used to reinforce the idea that the OAS is really changing.

The availability of financial resources is also a challenge. Today Latin American countries had no capacity and motivation to approve higher OAS budgets so OAS depends on external contributions. ¹⁴⁰ Today, the OAS has 35 member states and 67 states with the status of permanent observer. ¹⁴¹ This fact makes no sense. The number of the external contributors is almost twice the number of the member states.

Thinking realistically, it seems that looking for financial support, the OAS allowed the entrance of the influence of foreign actors, largely Europeans states, to influence American interests. It is difficult to believe that all these permanent observers simply donate their money

with a view to the prosperity of the American states. They participate in the OAS meetings and the OAS leaders travel to Europe to discuss American issues. The OAS must review this situation. The main financial sources must come from the member states.

In addition, Brazil, Venezuela and the US Congress have suspended or threatened to cut funding for the OAS—each for different reasons.¹⁴² Cutting support from Latin American countries will become a pattern if the CELAC succeeds. The member states will invest time, energy, material, human resources, and money in a promising new organization rather than an old and ineffective organization full of scars and controversies. Reform of the OAS must be significant and effective. A thin gloss of makeup will only be palliative and will not solve the problem: a kind of plastic surgery is necessary to remove the old scars of the face of the organization.

The Rio Treaty must be updated. It was created after the WWII and the US posture during the Malvinas / Falklands War turned it in a useless piece of paper with no valor. A new security treaty with a clear declaration of the US intentions towards Latin America could recover the lost credibility.

The advantage of the OAS is that it is still the only “premier political forum of the Americas” where states of North America, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean come jointly to debate their mutual objectives and work out their contentions.¹⁴³ Despite all the criticism that the OAS has received, it is still important and relevant to the Americas.

CONCLUSION

The challenges that the OAS is facing today are significant and demand immediate actions. Latin American states chose regionalism instead of the multilateralism. Regional organizations seem to be a necessary step towards a much more fair and balanced multilateralist system. However, the OAS is still on the horizon and, if reinvigorated, may be an ideal model for the future American integration. If the OAS continues to be inactive, impotent and irrelevant, other organizations will arise to take its place.

The current circumstances of the globalized world favor the adoption of reforms in the OAS system. Although Latin American states have a long road ahead of them to reach full “development” their social and economic growth and increased prosperity is reality. The gap between them and the US is diminishing. As the relative power between the US and Latin American states becomes diminished, the US will increasingly be motivated to more balanced negotiations.

Furthermore, when the economy goes well, everything else goes well too. Although there are some punctual cases that deserve special attention, in a macro-vision of the region, the Latin America states are becoming stronger and more capable of independent action with regard to their internal problems. The new stronger governments are capable of “walking on their own legs,” and will create stable and secured domestic environments. The circumstances of the past that motivated the US to intervene in some countries will rarely occur in the future.

There is room for regional organizations such as UNASUR, PARLACEN, and CARICOM. They can become subsystems of the OAS in the same way that the OAS is a subsystem of the UN. The OAS is a unique organization that encompasses all the countries in the American Continent. Nevertheless, the organization needs to radically change its

posture and implement all the necessary reforms in order to rescue the credibility of the Pan-American dream.

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